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Request for the inclusion of an item in the provisional agenda of the fifty-third session

Bethlehem 2000

Letter dated 15 May 1998 from the Permanent Representatives of Afghanistan, Cuba, Malta and Senegal to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

As members of the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and in response to a decision taken by the Committee at its 237th meeting, on 16 April 1998, we have the honour to request the inclusion of an item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" in the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, in accordance with rule 13 of the rules of procedure.

Attached please find an explanatory memorandum describing the importance of this commemoration for all humankind and the need for the United Nations to address this issue in a comprehensive manner through its General Assembly. In view of the special significance of the proposed item, which is of relevance to many different aspects of the work of the Assembly, we also have the honour to request that the item be considered directly in plenary meeting, without referral to a Main Committee.

(*Signed*) Ravan **Farhâdi**
Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Bruno **Rodríguez Parrilla**
Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations

(*Signed*) George **Saliba**
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Ibra Deguène **Ka**
Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations

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Annex

Explanatory memorandum

Bethlehem 2000

Bethlehem, Palestine, is one of the most historic and religiously significant sites on earth. In the year 2000, the past and the future will meet in Bethlehem in a global vision of hope and peace for all peoples. On that occasion, the world will celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ and the onset of the new millennium.

This event is of monumental importance not only for Palestinian people and for the region, but also for the believers of the world and for the international community as a whole. The occasion's worldwide significance also reflects a multidimensional character as it comprises a significant religious, historical and cultural dimension, as well as a contemporary dimension, marking the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third millennium for humankind.

As members of the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, we fully support the decision of the Palestinian National Authority to honour this legacy and to celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ and the dawning of the new millennium, by launching the Bethlehem 2000 Project. It is envisaged that the commemoration, which will be a vast and multi-faceted undertaking, will begin at Christmas 1999 and conclude at Easter 2001. A High Committee for the Bethlehem 2000 Project has been established, headed by President Yasser Arafat, with many religious authorities, individuals and institutions from around the world directly engaged in the planning and preparation.

A major step towards increasing the engagement and participation of the international community in the project is the Bethlehem 2000 Participants Conference, held at Brussels on 11 and 12 May 1998. The Conference was convened by the Bethlehem 2000 Project, in association with the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank. The Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People also attended this important event. The Conference provided an opportunity for decision makers from Governments, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, the international financial community, religious and cultural institutions and the media to contribute towards the success of the Bethlehem 2000 Project through financial contributions, investment, expertise and promotion of international awareness.

It is expected that approximately 2 million visitors will visit Bethlehem to celebrate the historic occasion that will be upon us with the dawning of the year 2000. To meet this huge undertaking, the Bethlehem 2000 Project envisages the following six programme components:

Events: Religious, cultural and artistic celebrations, on both the national and the international level;

Infrastructure: Plans to rehabilitate and upgrade the infrastructure network, including water, electricity, sewage and sanitation, and traffic and transportation;

Services: Plans to rehabilitate and upgrade basic services, including social and cultural, health and medical, police and security, emergency and civil defence, and traffic control and logistics services;

Cultural heritage: Plans to preserve and display the rich Palestinian past and history through a variety of exhibits, displays and events;

Tourism development: Plans to provide all necessary tourism services;

Private sector development: Encouragement of international investors to join with local investors and developers to provide accommodation, food, entertainment and information services.

Bethlehem 2000 will be an historical and momentous international event, requiring a high degree of engagement by the international community in organizing and preparing for the occasion, including financial and technical contributions to the preparations and actual participation in the commemorative events and activities.

As indicated above, some United Nations bodies and intergovernmental organizations have already begun contributing to the project. However, it is essential that the United Nations as a whole should display explicit interest in and support for this historical occasion, drawing the attention of the peoples of the world to its importance and assisting in making the event a moment for hope, peace, coexistence and prosperity for all humankind.

In view of all of the above, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has decided to authorize its Chairman and the members of its Bureau to request the inclusion of a new item, entitled "Bethlehem 2000", in the provisional agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. It is the strong hope of the Committee that a constructive debate will take place in the interest of the specified objectives and that wide consultation will pave the way for the unanimous adoption of a General Assembly resolution in this regard.